

The identification of forest *Accipiters* in central Africa

by M. Louette

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Prigogine (1980) considers the taxa *tachiro* and *toussenelii*, lumped in one species (African Goshawk) in *Birds of Africa* (Brown *et al.* 1982), as separate species, because in Zaïre, where admittedly they are virtually parapatric, there are no certain intermediates; he does not, however, mention their almost significant size difference (see Table 1, birds from the area of sympatry: Kivu). It is unfortunate that *Birds of Africa* illustrates adult males and immature females only, whereby the fact is masked that in the *tachiro* group, but not in the *toussenelii* group, the adult female is decidedly less reddish underneath than the male. The immatures are quite different as well (Brosset & Erard 1986): *toussenelii* is generally whitish underneath, with some individuals having restricted speckling on the breast; *tachiro* is variable but mostly more heavily speckled. Both have barring on the flanks and, in some individuals, on the thighs.

A smaller species, the Chestnut-flanked Sparrowhawk *Accipiter castanilius*, is correctly illustrated in Brown & Amadon (1968) and Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1970). In *Birds of Africa*, it is wrongly depicted, both the adult (male) and the immature. The adult (sexes are similar in colour) is depicted as lacking the very characteristic grey and very dark brown (not red, which is the colour of the flanks) barring on the underside, present in all 40 adult specimens of both sexes in the Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika. The adult bird shown is in fact more like the Ethiopian *unduliventer*, the Upper Guinean *macroscelides* and most (but not all; see illustration in Brosset & Erard 1986) Gabon and Cameroon *t. toussenelii* races of African Goshawk *sensu lato*, which are barred rufous and whitish.

The variation in *toussenelii* in Cameroon misled me earlier, when I thought that the two phenotypes present there belonged possibly to different species (Louette 1981). In fact, some specimens from north-western Zaïre are also slightly barred and there is variation in the colour of the thighs (white, greyish or reddish). In the equatorial forest belt, there is a cline from west to east in the number of individuals with barred underparts. Chapin (1921) found *toussenelii* from eastern Zaïre to be paler and described them as a new race, *canescens*, but in the larger series available now, it appears that the main distinguishing character is size (Table 1). It would be unwise to consider the whole Zaïre population as *canescens*, but the large, almost wholly unbarred Kivu birds may be named so.

The immature *A. castanilius* illustrated in *Birds of Africa* lacks the rusty colour on the thighs, present in all specimens, and resembles instead the immature of *A. toussenelii*, which is otherwise very similar. (In *unduliventer* and *macroscelides* and some of the central African race *sparsimfasciatus* of *A. tachiro*, the immature has rufous thighs as well.)

TABLE 1
Measurements (mm) of adults of central African *Accipiters*

	Wing chord	Claw of inner toe
<i>Accipiter toussenelii</i>		
9 males	192.8, s.d. 2.7	14.27, s.d. 0.72
from Equateur	(187.5–196.5, $n=8$)	(13.1–15.2)
10 females	225.1, s.d. 4.5	18.28, s.d. 0.45
from Equateur	(219–234.5, $n=9$)	(17.2–19.0)
10 females	231.7, s.d. 6.0	19.22, s.d. 0.66
from Kivu	(223–241.5)	(18.0–20.2)
<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>		
10 males	207.5, s.d. 4.5	16.45, s.d. 0.59
from Kivu	(199.5–213)	(15.6–17.5)
10 females	241.1, s.d. 5.3	19.99, s.d. 1.03
from Kivu	(234–251)	(18.4–21.9)
<i>Accipiter castanilius</i>		
10 females	186.0, s.d. 2.6	16.26, s.d. 0.74
from Equateur	(182.5–191)	(15.0–17.2)
8 females	189.1, s.d. 2.8	15.73, s.d. 0.50
from Kivu	(184–192.5, $n=7$)	(15.1–16.4)

My measurements of the tail for *macroscelides* (Louette 1974) are unaccountably long, but the wing measurements are correct, proving that in Upper Guinea the African Goshawk is of generally small size, not much larger than the Chestnut-flanked Sparrowhawk (which occurs in Lower Guinea only). Due to small size and barred underparts in Upper Guinea, the African Goshawk (*macroscelides*) there has been confused with the Chestnut-flanked Sparrowhawk; mistakenly, *Birds of Africa* shows the latter there on its map, though not in its text. Within *A. castanilius*, there is no geographical size difference between birds collected in Equateur and Kivu in Zaïre (Table 1), making the distinction of the latter birds under the name *beniensis* invalid. Neither does the limited material at my disposal from Cameroon suggest that the species is any smaller there. Pending further material, I consider *A. castanilius* as monotypic.

Because in its central African range *A. castanilius* is everywhere sympatric with *A. t. toussenelii* or *A. t. canescens*, apart from the above mentioned caveat for adults, there is a problem in distinguishing the immatures of the similar-sized female *castanilius* and male *toussenelii*, both in the hand and in the field. Their wing, tail, culmen and hind claw measurements are rather similar, and the length of the middle toe, though better separated, is not easy to measure on skins. The solution to the problem is given in Brosset's (1973) schematic drawings of the feet: the claw of the inner toe (the largest of the three anterior ones) is longer in *castanilius*, which nevertheless has a shorter wing (Table 1). This corresponds with its different ecology, this species being a rather specialised bird hunter, whereas *toussenelii* also catches mammals and lower vertebrates (Wattel 1972, Brosset 1973, Brosset & Erard 1986). The general size of birds in immature plumage is the same as that of the adult bird (Table 2 illustrates this for one size category), only the tail may be

TABLE 2
Measurements (mm) of male *Accipiter castanilius*

	Wing chord	Claw of inner toe
10 adults	158.7 s.d. 4.1	12.83 s.d. 0.37
from Equateur	(150.5–164)	(12.2–13.5)
10 immatures from	158.6 s.d. 2.5	12.51 s.d. 0.57
Equateur & W. Uele	(154–161.5)	(11.5–13.3)

longer in the immature (see De Vos *et al.* in prep.). The toes and claws rapidly attain their final size in these raptors and this makes it possible to identify the immatures.

A key for immature birds in central Africa

1. wing (generally well) over 197 mm: 2.
- 1*. wing shorter than 197 mm, but over 174 mm: 4.
- 1**. wing shorter than 174 mm, thighs with rufous: male *castanilius*.
2. thighs white (possibly barred brown), mostly sparingly speckled underneath: female *toussenelii*.
- 2*. heavy speckling underneath, generally yellowish underside or rusty thighs: *tachiro* (only in eastern or southern Zaïre): 3.
3. wing shorter than 223 mm: male.
- 3*. wing longer: female.
4. thighs with rufous, claw of inner toe over 14.9 mm: female *castanilius*.
- 4*. thighs white (possibly barred brown), breast and belly usually very whitish, claw of inner toe under 15.3 mm: male *toussenelii*.

There is no danger of confusing the similar-sized male of *A. castanilius* with the female of the Red-thighed Sparrowhawk *A. erythropus*, because in the latter species the white rump is present in all ages and sexes. Immature females of the African Goshawk can be separated from immature (males) of the Black Sparrowhawk *A. melanoleucus*: in the latter species, the immature is always rufous (some *tachiro* are also rufous), but streaked underneath, not speckled or barred.

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Address: Dr Michel Louette, Koninklijk Museum voor Midden-Afrika, B-3080 Tervuren, Belgium.

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Dark plumaged House Martins *Delichon urbica* in northeastern Siberia

by J.S. Ash

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During 13–15 June 1991 several House Martins *Delichon urbica*, on which the normally white areas of the plumage were more or less obscured with dark colouration, were observed close to the town of Anadyr (64°35'N, 177°20'E) in northeastern Siberia. This area is situated in the tundra zone and is beyond the eastern limit of this martin's breeding distribution as shown in Cramp (1988) and at the absolute eastern limit of it as shown in Turner & Rose (1989).

The birds involved consisted of a group of *c.*10 at any one time feeding round and over a small pool on the boundary of a rather busy airport. Snow and ice had apparently cleared from the area in the previous week or two, but it was not known for how long the birds had been there nor even whether the same individuals were present during the time I was there. Other birds were seen from a bus at Anadyr close to buildings, but they were not examined for dark individuals. Possibly all the birds were still on passage, for 30 mostly rather distant House Martins were seen feeding over a river at Kantschalan, *c.*150 km NNE of Anadyr, on 17 June. A few of these seen well enough were not discoloured.

Description of discoloured birds

No two of the abnormally coloured birds were exactly alike and the degrees of variation are described here:

1. White rump above, and below all dark except for whitish throat and sides of neck.
2. White rump above; all dark below without any indication of even where the edge of the white on the underparts was.
3. As no. 2, but with a trace of white on the throat and belly. This bird was bathing frequently, by splashing into the water from the air, and had some dishevelled remiges and rectrices.